



PROCEEDINGS OF THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL WORKSHOP ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

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PROGRESS AND RESULTS OF HEAD STARTING KEMP'S RIDLEY

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The Kemp's ridley head start experiment of the National Marine Fisheries Service Galveston Laboratory entered into its thirteenth year in 1990. Improvements included the completion of a new head start facility in April 1990. Two of the original quonset huts used to house turtles were destroyed by Hurricane Jerry in October 1989; however, no turtles were lost as a result of the storm. The new 550 m² metal frame, concrete-floored building is capable of housing 1600 hatchlings.

Additional changes include the discontinuation of the Padre Island phase of the experiment in 1989. From 1978-1988 we attempted to establish a second nesting beach at Padre Island, Texas in cooperation with the National Park Service. Eggs were collected at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico and then transferred to Padre Island National Seashore to be artificially incubated in polystyrene foam boxes. To date, there have been no confirmed reports of head started Kemp's ridleys nesting at Padre Island. Hatchlings are now received directly from the nesting beach at Rancho Nuevo. As of 31 December 1990, 21,682 hatchlings had been received for head starting. Of these, 72.9% were "imprinted" to Padre Island, 26.2% to Rancho Nuevo, and .9% represented F1 generation turtles from head started Kemp's ridley that were held at the Cayman Island Turtle Farm (1983) Ltd.

Average survival rate for year-classes 1978-1989 was 86.5%. As of 31 December 1990, 16,590 (84.4% of those received alive for head starting) had been head started, tagged and released in the Gulf of Mexico.

As of 31 December 1990, 675 recoveries of head started turtles have been reported. Most of the recoveries were reported from Texas (62.2%) and Louisiana (13.0%); this is not surprising, since 78.6% of the turtles were released in Texas waters. Only 18.8% of the releases occurred in inshore waters, while 46.4% of the recoveries for which an area was reported were from inshore waters. Strandings accounted for the majority of the recoveries with 43.8%. Sixteen percent of those stranded were reported as alive and 27.8% were stranded dead. Twenty-two percent were incidentally captured in shrimp trawls, the second most frequently reported method of recovery. Of those captured in shrimp trawls, 71.3% were reported as alive, 19.3% dead and no condition was reported for 9.3%. Over half (57.3%) of the turtles recovered by all recovery methods have been reported as alive.